

## ॥ उपदेशपञ्चकम् ॥

### *Upadesa-pancakam* of Adi Sankaracharya – Part I

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#### **Introduction**

This work of Adi Sankaracharya is also known by several other names such as, *sopAna-pancakam* or *sAdhana-pancakam* or *advaita-pancakam*. The word *pancakam* is common in all of them indicating that it is a text comprising five verses. It is called *upadeSA-pancakam* since the Acharya gives a series of instructions to an aspiring seeker. It is called *sopAn-pancakam* because, the teachings are given in a graded manner as a flight of stairs (*sopAna*). It is called *advaita-pancakam* because the verses deal with the advaitic teaching contained in the Vedas. It is called *sAdhana-pancakam* because, it deals with a series of disciplines or *sAdhanas* to be followed by everyone.

The *sAdhanas* prescribed in this work are aimed to address two aspects, namely, 1. Discovering the ultimate goal of human birth, and 2. Accomplishment of that goal. Keeping this view, the Acharya presents a series of disciplines as given in our vedic scriptures.

The scheme of life as described in the Vedas comprise two aspects known as a) the *varNa* scheme and b) the *ASrama* scheme. In the

*varNa* scheme, the society is divided in to four groups, namely, the *brAhmaNa*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *SUdra*. This division is primarily based on the vocation or profession, or the role played in society. This alone later got the notorious name of the caste system which is almost defunct and no more followed by anyone. While the prescription of the *varNa* scheme is for societal harmony and growth, the *ASrama* scheme is prescribed with the view of the individual harmony and growth. And in this work Sankaracharya is primarily concerned with the *ASrama* scheme since he is addressing an individual seeker with a purpose of life.

The four *ASramas* as prescribed in the scriptures are:

1. *Brahmacharya ASrama* → student life
2. *Grihastha ASrama* → house-holder life
3. *VAnaprastha ASrama* → hermit life
4. *SanyAsa ASrama* → Monk life

This scheme also is not adhered to as much these days and has only a skeletal existence. However, even though this scheme is not physically

followed now, still, mentally everyone has to go through these four stages to achieve the goal.

Irrespective of *varNa* and *ASrama*, religion etc., there are certain universal disciplines or duties – *sAmAnyā dharmas* – prescribed by the scriptures. These can be broadly classified as 1) *yamA*: - in the form of don'ts (avoidance) and 2) *niyamA*: -in the form of do's (adherence).

*yamA*: - These are five disciplines, namely,

- a. *ahimsA* avoidance of harm to anyone
- b. *satyam* avoidance of un-truth
- c. *asteyam* avoidance of possession of illegitimate wealth
- d. *aparigraha* avoidance of possession of too much wealth, even though legal
- e. *brahmacaryam* avoidance of illegitimate relationship with opposite sex

*niyamA*: - These are five disciplines, namely,

- a. *saucam* purity – internal and external
- b. *santoshā*: contentment
- c. *tapas*: willful self-denial to avoid slavery to sense organs
- d. *svAdhyAya*: study of scriptures
- e. *Iswara praNidhAnam* worship of God

These ten are universal disciplines to be followed by all. Then, there are *viSesha dharmas* – special disciplines – to be followed based on the *varNa* and *ASrama* designation of a person.

They are called *varNASrama-dharma* or *viSesha-dharma* or *svadharma*.

In this text, Sankaracharya does not discuss the universal disciplines which are common to all. He only prescribes the special disciplines to be taken care of at the four *ASrama* stages of life.

The contention of the Acharya is that, a person who follows the four stages of *ASrama*, will be able to discover the goal of life and to accomplish the goal. Thus *upadeSa-pancakam* talks about the disciplines related to these four stages of life.

#### **The four stages of Life as given in scriptures:**

The primary emphasis of the *Brahmacharya ASrama* is the study of scriptures<sup>1</sup>. The scriptures teach the duties of each of the stages of life, the do's (*vidhi*) and don'ts (*nisheda*). The term *brahma* refers to Vedas and *charI* means the one who follows.

The second stage is *Grihastha ASrama*, where one takes to a life of various activities – *Karma* - specific to a particular *VarNa*. The *karmakANDa* portion of the Vedas discuss these *karmas*. When one follows these set of activities with the right attitude, one becomes a *karmayogi* and gains mental purity – *cittaSuddhi*: - which gives the person freedom from *rAga-dvesha* (likes and dislikes) leading to an attitude of equanimity –*samatvam*.

The third stage is *VAnaprastha ASrama*, where the extravert physical activities are reduced gradually, replaced by mental disciplines in the form of meditation – *upAsana*. The *upAsanakANDa* of the Vedas gives various types of meditation. When one goes through this discipline withdrawing from physical activity, one may either go out of the house and may lead a quieter life at home without interfering with the affairs of the house. Such a life committed to meditation will give the capacity to focus – *citta-ekAgrata*. When one goes through the *GrihasthASrama* and *VAnaprathASrama*, one gains purity of mind and focus of mind.

The final stage of life is *sannyAsa ASrama*, where one renounces completely and becomes free from all psychological dependencies. If they are physically and mentally renounced, one becomes an external *sannyasi*; but if one renounces them mentally alone, one becomes an internal *sannyasi*. The primary discipline of this *ASrama* is *jnAnayoga* – pursuit of spiritual (or Self) knowledge, which corresponds to the *jnAnakANDa* portion of the Vedas. By following this path one can become a *jnAnI* – wise person, or to put in another language, one becomes a *jIvanmukta*: - one who has discovered inner freedom – liberation.

Adi Sankaracharya talks about these four stages, namely, study of scriptures (*veda-adhyayanam*) in *brahmacharyASrama*;

*karmayoga* in *grihasthASrama*, *upAsana* in *VAnaprasthASrama* and *jnAnayoga* in *SannyAsASrama*.

The first *sloka* of *upadeSa-pancakam* talks about the first two stages; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> *slokas* talk about the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stages. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> *slokas* talk about some general instructions to be followed. With this background, we may now enter in to the text.

वेदो नित्यमधीयतां तदुदितं कर्म स्वनुष्ठीयताम् ।  
तेनेशस्य विधीयतामपचितिः काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ॥  
पापौघः परिधूयतां भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ।  
आत्मेच्छा व्यवसीयतां निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥

वेदो नित्यमधीयताम् । *Vedo nityam adhIyatAm* - the scriptures must be regularly studied.

This instruction corresponds to the *brahmacharyASrama*. However, this should be retained in the other *ASramas* also; otherwise they will be forgotten. The study comprises both learning to chant the scriptures - *adhyayanam* and then their analysis- *meemAmsA*. To understand the correct meaning of Vedas, one should learn the auxiliary texts also, known as the *vedAnga*<sup>1</sup>. So the process of leaning in the *brahmacharyASrama* involves, learning of Vedas, then learning of the *vedAngas*, and do the analysis. And such a student, when he comes out of the school, will be a cultured person with a clear goal of life and how to be part of a society.

तदुदितं कर्म स्वनुष्ठीयताम् । *taduditam*

*karmasvanushThIyatAm* – Perform the duties enjoined in them

The Acharya then gives the instruction to a *GrihasthASramI*. Here one has to start to implement the learning. The stage of implementation is following the *karmas* prescribed in the Vedas, in addition to the ten *sAmAnyA dharmas* given earlier. These *karmas* can be broadly classified into three, namely,

1. *nishkAma karma* - these are compulsory duties, regardless of one's likes and dislikes and are meant for spiritual growth. These are vedic commandments.
2. *sakAma karma* - these are based on one's likes or desires, which means that they are not compulsory, and are meant for material well being, and
3. *Nishiddha karma* – these are actions which are banned or prohibited by the scriptures, and have to be renounced.

The Acharya says, may one perform the compulsory duties - the *nishkAma karma* or *svadharma* - without fail. *Svadharma* is determined by one's *varNa* and *ASrama* and both are almost not followed today. So, the *svadharma* has to be interpreted according to the present day needs, which should be practicable for all regardless of *varNa* and *ASrama*. For this purpose, the scriptures prescribe a set of common, practical duties, known as *panca-mahA-yajnas* –( five-fold duties) which can be followed by all. They are:

- 1) *deva-yajna* - worship of the Lord in whatever capacity one can with faith

- 2) *pitru-yajna* – worship of the forefathers, as an expression of gratitude to them
- 3) *brahma-yajna* – worship of the Vedas and the Rishis. It is because of the Rishis that we got the scriptures based on which the entire tradition is built. So, one has to work for the preservation and propagation of the scriptures.
- 4) *manushya-yajna* : our appreciation to every other human being, because of whose contribution to the society, one can lead a comfortable life.
- 5) *bhUta-yajna* – worship of the eco-system, protection of environment, animals, etc.

These *panca-mahA-yajnas* are compulsory to all and should be practiced by all regardless of *varNa* and *ASrama*.

तेन ईशस्य अपचितिः विधीयतां । *tena-ISasya apaciti: vidhIyatAm* – May worship be offered to the lord thru your practice of *svadharma*

Here *tena* refers to *svadharma anushThAnena* – by the practice of one's *svadharma*.

*apaciti:-* Puja, worship  
*vidhIyatAm* – may be offered

That means, worship is not merely offering flowers etc in a temple; it includes worship of forefathers, rishis, service to fellow humans and protection of plants and animals etc. Only when all these are practiced, the worship of the lord is complete.

The above adherence refers to *nishkAma karma*. Regarding *sakAma karma*, he says,

काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ॥ *kAmye matistyaajyatAm* –

May you give up the actions meant for material wealth

This means one should be satisfied with what one has, and acquire only that much to lead a simple life. Here *kAmye* refers to *sakAma kAmas* and *mati:* refers to interest or craving; *tyajyatAm* → may you give up (gradually).

पापौघः परिधूयताम् । *pApaugha: paridhUyatAm*  
Strive against the call of likes and dislikes.

*Ogha:* - multitudes or bundles of

*pApa* : here, *rAga-dvesha* – likes and dislikes; they are called *pApa*, because they obstruct spiritual growth.

*paridhUyatAm* – should be wiped out, cleaned

Since in following *svadharma*, worship of the Lord is done which gives the blessing of the Lord and so, the mind becomes cleaner and cleaner. When the mind becomes free from the grip of *rAga-dvesha*,

भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयताम् । *bhavasukhe*

*dosho(a)nusandhIyatAm* – May you see the defects of worldly accomplishments.

This is more an explanation of the previous instruction – *pApaugha: paridhUyatAm* – paraphrased here.

*Bhava* → world; *sukham* → pleasures; ie. worldly material pleasures

Generally we talk about three-fold defects in worldly pleasures:

1. *Du:kha-miSritvam* - they are mixed with pain – since, to acquire, preserve and to lose, one has to go through pain
2. *atrupti-karatvam* – will never give satisfaction
3. *bandhakatvam* –will make one slave of them; one gets addicted to them

And, by following one's *svadharma*, through a refined mind, one will be able to discern these defects. That means, one becomes a *viveki* – mature person. And because of that, one can renounce *kAmya-karmas* discussed earlier. It is not enough if one understands this; it should be constantly remembered; so the teacher says, *anusandhIyatAm* – should be constantly reminded.

Since material pleasures are defective leading to sorrow, one turns one's attention from them to spiritual fulfillment.

आत्मेच्छा व्यवसीयताम् । *AtmecchA vyvasIyatAm*  
– May you cultivate strong desire for *AtmA*, the infinite, ever secure and stable.

That means, one should turn away from ephemeral –*anityam*, to eternal – *nityam*, which requires the ability to discriminate between them, namely, *viveka*. Then, to turn away from *anityam*, one needs to have dispassion or *vairAgyam*. And to crave for what is *nityam*, one needs *mumukshutvam*. Thus, *viveka*, *vairAgya* and *mumukshutvam* are implied in these three lines, as follows:

*pApaugha: paridhUyatAm* → indicates *viveka*  
*bhavasukhe dosho(a)nusandhIyatAm* →  
indicates *vairAgya*, and,  
*AtmecchA vyavasiyatAm* → indicates  
*mumukshutvam*

Thus, the first stage, namely, *brahmacharya*  
*ASrama*, enables a person to learn the vedic  
scheme of life, and the second stage, namely,  
*GrihasthASrama*, enables one to get *viveka*,  
*vairAgya* and *mumukshutvam*, through  
*svadharma anushThAna* or *karmayoga*.

Then one comes to the third stage, given as,

निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥ *nijagrihAt tUrNam*

*vinirgamyatAm* – May you get out of  
(attachment to) your home as soon as possible.

*tUrNam* → immediately, quickly  
*nijagrihAt* → from one's home  
*vinirgamyatAm* → May you get out.

which indicates the third *ASrama*, namely,  
*vAnaprathASrama*.

That means, actions (*karma*) are reduced  
significantly giving place to meditation or  
*upAsana*.

Till then, the mind was extravert only all the  
time, and to come to *vedAnta*, one has to be  
more internally focused.

One can get in to this life style either by  
physically leaving one's home and retiring to

seclusion, or stay in the home itself without any  
active participation in the affairs of the home.

सङ्गः सत्सु विधीयतां भगवतो भक्तिर्दृढा धीयताम् ।

शान्त्यादिः परिचीयतां दृढतरं कर्माशु सन्त्यज्यताम् ॥

सद्विद्वानुपसर्प्यतां प्रतिदिनं तत्पादुकासेव्यताम् ।

ब्रह्मैकाक्षरमर्थ्यतां श्रुतिशिरोवाक्यं समाकर्ण्यताम् ॥

To maintain the spiritual urge and develop it in  
the third stage, the Acharya says,

सङ्गः सत्सु विधीयताम् । *sanga: satsu vidhIyatAm*

May you have *satsanga*, association with  
spiritual seekers and wise people as much as  
possible, and

भगवतो भक्तिर्दृढा धीयताम् । *bhagavato*

*bhaktirdriDhA dhiyatAm* – May you resort to an  
intense devotion to god.

Here *bhakti* means *upAsana* – meditation, which  
always goes with Patanjali's *ashTAngayoga*,  
which are:

1. *yama: ahimsA, satyam, asteyam, aparigraha*  
and *brahmacharyam*, as seen earlier.
2. *niyama: saucham, santosha:, tapas,*  
*svAdhyAya* and *ISwara-praNidhAnam*, as  
seen earlier. So, *yama* and *niyama* will  
streamline one's activities.
3. *Asana* : Will integrate the physical body  
through *yogAsanas*.
4. *prANAyAma* : breathing discipline
5. *pratyAhAra*: discipline of sense organs
6. *dhAraNa* ability to hold in the mind
7. *dhyAna* ability to focus the mind
8. *samAdhi* ability to get absorbed in the mind

This scheme helps to integrate the personality.



With the practice of *yoga* and *upAsanA*, one should develop another group of six-fold disciplines, called, *SamAdi-shaTka-samapatti*: Which are,

1. *Sama* → mind or thought control
2. *dama* → sense control
3. *uparama* → the mind from unwanted fields, should not again go back to them
4. *titkshA* → inner strength to face opposite experiences of life
5. *SraddhA* → faith in the scriptures and the guru
6. *samadhAnam* → concentration; non-wavering mind

शान्त्यादिः परिचीयताम्। ShAntyAdi:

*paricIyatAm* – May you develop *ShamAdi-shaTka-sampatti* or *citta ekAgratA* – focused mind

With this third stage, namely *vAnaprastha ASrama* is over. Now the Acharya talks about the last stage, namely, pursuit of *jnAnayoga* entering in to *sannyAsa ASrama*.

दृढतरं कर्माशु सन्त्यज्यताम्॥ *driDhataram*

*karmAshu samtyajyatAm* – may all karmas and upasanas be totally given up.

*driDhataram* --. Absolutely, firmly; all karmas can be given up at this stage because, they have served their purpose of getting *cittaSuddhi* and *citta ekAgratA*.

To pursue *jnAnayoga*, one should seek the help of a competent teacher

सद्विद्वानुपसर्प्यताम्। *sad-vidwAn-upasarpyatAm* –

may a wise person be approached by you. One has to seek a teacher for gaining knowledge, who is a *sad-vidwAn*, a *jnAnI* or a competent teacher, who has also studied under the guidance of his teacher, coming through the *guru-paramparA*. And,

प्रतिदिनं तत्पादुकासेव्यताम्। *pratidinan-tad-*

*pAduka-sevyatAm* –May his sandals (representing his feet) be worshipped by you. In this process, the student the ego and develops faith in the teacher who is the personification of the scriptures themselves. In addition, direct contact with the teacher also enables the student to firm up his *viveka*, *vairagya* etc. qualifications. And then,

ब्रह्मैकाक्षरमर्थ्यताम्। *brahmaikAsharm-arthyatAm*

May the knowledge of *Brahman* be asked. Here *eka-aksharam* indicates the non-dual, imperishable, reality. In this context, *Brahman* should be taken as *brahmajnAnam*. *JnAnayoga* comprises *SravaNam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyAsanam*, which the Acharya mentions briefly,

श्रुतिशिरोवाक्यं *Sruti-shiro-vAkyam*; means

*vedAnta (Sruti-shira:)* or *Upanishad-vAkyam*

समाकर्ण्यताम्॥ *samAkarNayatAm* – may you

listen (to the teachings of the *Upanishad*.). The

study should be systematic through proper analysis; i.e understanding the term “*tvam*” (you) through *pancakosa -vicAra*, *avasthAtraya -vicAra*; then understanding the term “*tat*” (*Iswara*) and finally the identity of their essential nature should be discovered, implied by the term “*asi*” of *tat tvam asi*. The first one is the analysis of *jIvAtmA* which is done using the *anvaya-vyatirikta* method, in which one arrives at the conclusion that whatever is the permanent or essential feature is its intrinsic nature. For example, the hotness of fire. By this method one arrives at the essential or intrinsic nature of *jIvAtmA* (microcosm) as *cit* or awareness principle. And the essential nature of *paramAtmA*, the *Iswara*, is through the analysis of creation – *SrushTi-vicAra*: - by the *adhyAropa-apavAda* method, which gives the essential nature of the totality, macrocosm, which is pure existence, *sat*. Once these two are understood, then comes the *mahAvAkya – tat tvam asi*, which means that pure Existence and pure Consciousness (Awareness) are one and the same. So, by *sam-AkarNyatAm*, the author implies systematic listening and understanding. More about *SravaNam* is discussed in the next sloka.

(to be continued)

Source Material:

1. Paramartha Tattvam – Volume 1 – The Vedas and Our Scriptures
2. Lectures of Swami Paramarthananda, Chennai, India.
3. Sankara the Missionary Part 1, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Bombay